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BANTU STUDIES

BUSHMAN TERMS OF RELATIONSHIP

By D. F. Bleek

I. Southern Group: The ǂxam-ka-ǀ'e *or Bushmen of the old Cape Colony*

THE ǂxam-ka-ǀ'e follow the descriptive method of denoting relationships, though we find some general titles or possibly expressions of affection and respect among them.

Many of their terms of relationship allow an etymological explanation. Thus, **ca** "father" is identical with **ca** "out of", sometimes used as "to come out of". **Xoa** "mother" seems to be a feminine contracted form of the same word, **xai** being the feminine ending of ⊙**pwaxai** "daughter", and ǁ**kaxai** "sister", the masculine forms of which are ⊙**pwoŋ** "son", and ǁ**kã** "brother".

In Nama **ca** is a vulgar word for "beget" or "bear", **caĭ** is "child", while **xai** signifies "to cohabit", **xais** being often used as "wife".

Oa forms the plural **oakn-gu** or **okn-gu**, which may denote "fathers" or "parents". **Xoa** forms **xoakn-gu** "mothers", often used where we should say "the older women" or "mother and her friends".

The words **ibo, itau** are terms of address, "my father," "my mother." Though **i** alone means "we", here it is used for "my". "One person is the one who says **ibo**," was a Bushman's explanation. "Our father" would be **i oa**. **Ibo** sometimes becomes **bobo**. I think it may have some connexion with the Nama masculine ending **ba**, and **itau** with the Nama feminine plural ending **ti** or **te**, corresponding to an old femine singular **ta**, now turned in Nama to **sa**. **Taras** is the Nama polite term for "woman", "mistress". Certainly **te, ite, aiti** appear as endings to feminine terms of relationship among the ǂxam-ka-ǀ'e as in **ǂaiti** "wife", "woman", **ǀkoĭte** "granny", ⊙**pwaitente** "mother-in-law", ǁ**k'aiti** "child's mother-in-law". In some masculine terms of relationship we get

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193 ŋ or ŋ or a nasalization of the vowel, as ǂkõĩŋ "grandfather", ǁkã "brother", ʘpwoŋ "son", ǁk'en "child's father-in-law".

[196] [601] These endings are particularly interesting, as otherwise the ǂxam language has no signs of gender. Perhaps they show that in some former stage this was a language with genders, just as English still shows its old division into genders in its names for classes of people.

601 [192] On the use of tata a Bushman said: "We say ǁbo, we say ǂ oa, but the children who are lately there say tata; they should say ǁbo. The habit of saying tata comes from the Boers."

193 196 601 ʘpwa is the ǂxam diminutive; in allied dialects it denotes "child", which in ǂxam is ǂkwã. That ʘpoŋ "son" and ʘpwaxai "daughter" are derivatives is clear. I think that ʘpwai-ǁhĩ "father-in-law" is derived from ʘpwa "child" and ǁhaŋ "to marry", the man whose child one marries. ʘpwaǂente would be the feminine form thereof. ǁha "husband", "wife" is certainly derived from ǁhaŋ.

The second, more unusual title for parents-in-law I cannot explain; ǂkwi is "person", but I have no example of any other use of ǁk'a, except that it seems part of the terms ǁk'en and ǁk'aiti, applied to the parents of a son- or daughter-in-law, or of a brother- or sister-in-law.

606 On a man's behaviour to his parents-in-law we have the following note: "They (the sons-in-law) do not talk to their mother-in-law in haste, for they are silent. Their father-in-law is the one with whom they talk. He (the son-in-law) acts like this, at another time he does not talk to his father-in-law; he merely talks to his wife, his wife is the one who talks to her father. He also acts like this to his mother-in-law, he speaks with her. He speaks with her, he is silent."

This looks as if there are occasions on which one or other of the wife's parents may be addressed, and others when they may [538] not. I have noticed in their stories of the Mantis, that his adopted daughter's husband does not often address the Mantis directly, but says to his own son, "Tell Grandfather so-and-so," which the child does. However, in one story the two men speak directly to each other.

196 601 ǁkã, ǁkaxai "brother", "sister", may be derived from ǁka "like", "to be like". In Nama ǁkâb means "the same". The adjective ǂkori simply means "big".

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I think ǃkōŋ, ǃkoŋ̃e "grandfather", "grandmother" are derived from ǃkuŋ̃a "great", "large", "stout". These terms are used in addressing any elderly relatives, or people distinctly senior to the speaker, much as "Oom", "Tante" are used in Afrikaans. In the tables appended I give these titles, where they were specially mentioned in a list of terms of relationship, but in the folklore they are so widely used, that one might sometimes translate them "old man", "old woman". 196 601

I can give no explanation of the fact, that a woman calls her father's parents her "real" grandparents, and her mother's parents her "lent" ones, while a man reverses the process; his mother's parents are his "real" grandparents. My aunt, Dr. Lloyd, who took down this information, evidently made no inquiry, and to-day there are no Colonial Bushmen left capable of telling us. These adjectives are not used in ordinary conversation, any more than we use the terms "paternal", "maternal". 601 [124]

The Bushman did not explain why the mother's brother is called "son". I should say a particularly affectionate relationship is indicated. As to the title for the mother's sister, he said: "They are wont to say their 'grandmother' to their mother's sister, they say their 'grandmother' to her. A man says his 'daughter' to her. Then the man's aunt says her 'father' to him, for they (the mother and aunt) feel that they are women who are one. Bushmen say, women who are one, to the women of one house. When girls have one mother, they say they are women who are one."

ǃke means "companion", "friend", "someone loved". ǂoa ǃke-ke means "mother's other friend" or "chum", of whom was said: "They make their other friend of one person; they say their other friend to her." 196 601

In certain ǃxam tales the wife's unmarried younger sister stays with her, as helper and baby-minder. An elder sister would be sure to be married. This sister I take to be the "other friend" of the wife, the "little sister-in-law" of the husband, the ǃkouki-ʘpwa. For this term is only applied to a little girl. [538]

I know of no marriage laws among the Bushmen to explain the title of sister being occasionally given to the father's or mother's sister's daughter. Bushmen sometimes marry a cousin of that or any other sort, but more often they marry someone else. The only girl a Bushman may not marry is his *own* sister. 582 601

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601 I believe the term "sister" is used to a cousin who has been
[597] brought up as an adopted child in the speaker's family, just as a grandparent calls a grandchild "my child", if he adopts it.

[595] The ǂxam-ka-ǂ'e are monogamous, and in their folklore there is only one case of the punishment of incest, that of brother and sister.

I do not know whether the omissions in this table of relationships are accidental, or owing to the fact that the terms omitted are seldom or never used.

II. Northern Group: The ǂk'au ǂen (*Auen*), *and* ǂkuŋ *or Bushmen of the N.W. Kalahari*

193 These tribes likewise use the descriptive method in denoting
601 terms of relationship. They, too, show in a few of such terms endings for masculine and feminine, which do not appear in any other nouns. For example: tai or aiŋ "brother", taisi "sister", where we again find nasalization for the masculine, and ai instead of ti for the feminine ending, or a prefixed di "female".

[193] Ma is the diminutive ending; ǂna means "big, grown up", ǂga
● 196 means "old, worn out". ǂku or ǂkū I think means "kinsman" or
601 "namesake". Thus the greatuncle is the "old kinsman", the mother's brother is the "big kinsman", the father's brother and sister are "little" ones, as are cousins, nephews and nieces, which would point to their having less influence. This rather contradicts the statement of the ǂk'au ǂen, that in case of a man's death, his brother must provide for his children. However, the father's brother is addressed as tshu or tsu, a term of affection applied in this tongue more to relations by marriage, but in ǂkuŋ, used by grandparents and grandchildren mutually, and by uncle and nephew. ǂko, the name for the mother's sister is, I think, a word related to ǂkoïte "grandmother", probably a feminine form of ǂku or ǂkōïŋ. Mama used reciprocally by grandparents and grandchildren seems to be a term of affection.

Ba and tai are evidently related to the ǂxam terms of address to parents ibo, itau. There is no special word for husband or wife in these two dialects. ǂkwā and ǂkao are simply "man", and dzou and zau "woman". ǂkwā o m ba seems to mean "man of my father", which does not seem sense for the mother's father. Tai o dzou "mother of wife" is of course quite clear.

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Naron

Some ǂk'au ǁen terms are apparently borrowed from Naron, for instance, ǂwiakwe "brother-in-law" and ǁkū "greatniece". ǂwi ǂkwā would be the correct form, corresponding to ǂwi dzou "sister-in-law". ǁkū is simply Naron for "child". My informants lived on the border of the tribes, and so they often used Naron words or Naron forms of roots belonging to both.

The ǂkuŋ terms show more variety. ǂkū ǂnue seems to be "one namesake" or "first namesake" or "kinsman". ǁga and ǁge seem peculiar to this dialect. They may be northern forms of ǁkā "brother", or of the Naron ǁka.

On the relationship between son-in-law and father-in-law the following note appears in a ǂkuŋ story, explaining the sentence, "A person called him 'Kai-he'."

"The person did not say his (Karu's) name, but just called him by the little word which is his name, 'Ai-he.' His mother-in-law said, 'My son-in-law,' but his father-in-law did not call him 'My son-in-law', but addressed him as 'Ai-he'. And he heard his father-in-law. His father-in-law was a man, and respected his daughter, so did not say his daughter's husband's name, but merely called his son-in-law by his little name which was 'Ai-he'."

III. The Naron *or Bushmen of the Central Kalahari*

This tribe is less descriptive in its terms of relationship than its Northern and Southern neighbours, yet its system can hardly be called a classificatory one. Remarkable is the number of reciprocal titles used between different generations. Grandparents and grandchildren address each other as **mama**. Parents and children call each other by two forms of the same roots, either **aba** or **ǁku**. **Aba** is the verb "to bear", "to beget", also "to carry in a kaross". The father is the begetter, the child the begotten one. **Eisha** I take to be a contracted feminine form of the same.

ǁkuŋ is also used as "big, grown up", **ǁkuŋ kwena** means "grown-up people", **ǁkuŋ ǂarro kwena** "old people", literally "big bodied people". The application of this word to parents is easy to understand, but the use of a very similar form to designate children is not clear.

Likewise the word **tahō** is a puzzle. It is used for all grandchildren, but only for the father's parents. It is employed reciprocally between a mother's brother and a sister's child. A

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196 601 woman calls her brothers-in-law by words formed from this root, but not her sisters-in-law; whereas a man does the opposite. The result is, that anyone calling a connexion tahō is called tahō by that person. Other connexions are called **twi**, a word which seems to mean "to tie", "to net", as **twishiba** "a riempi net", or "string bag". A woman calls both parents-in-law and son- and daughter-in-law **twi**, but a man calls his wife's parents simply "father" and "mother". I think he calls his son- and daughter-in-law **twi**, but have no clear examples.

591 Women are said to leave their own home on marriage, and to be taken to the husband's home. But in a few months, when the wife has settled down, it is customary for the young couple to return to her parents' home and stay there till the first child is about a year old, so that the girl may have her mother's help and advice. Sometimes the son-in-law settles altogether with his wife's people, but not always. In fact, the **Naron** all say that a man must settle at his father's place, though they do not always do so. This does not explain why a man calls his wife's parents "father" and "mother".

606 A man is supposed not to speak to his mother-in-law, nor a woman to her father-in-law. Of the former I had personal evidence: my Bushman kitchen boy would not enter a room in which his mother-in-law happened to be. As to not speaking, I think that means more—not sitting near, not consorting with a person, rather than never addressing him. A **Naron** granny gave 183 553 578 606 me a vivid description of the family settling the name of a new-born child. The relations present all quarrel over it: the father says, he wants the little girl called after one of his people, but the mother's mother tells him that is not at all necessary, the baby is to be named after her. This shows that speech between the two is not absolutely forbidden.

183 593 There is a prohibition against a grown-up brother and sister speaking or sitting together,—but here, too, the sitting, not the speaking, is the important part. I have heard a fully grown brother and sister addressing each other, while passing at a good distance. This rule explains why the relationship between a man 604 601 and his brother's child is nearer than that with his sister's child, the former being called **ǂku** "son", the latter **tshō**, a more distant term; whereas a woman calls her sister's son "son", her brother's son **tshō**.

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Brother and sister are the only relations who are forbidden to marry, and by this, real brother and sister are meant, the children of one father and mother, not cousins. I never heard a title for any cousin, however related, though several were present Cousins sometimes marry, but more often a bride from a distance is procured. 582

A pair of sisters have a very close relationship. They are generally chums, and help each other with their babies. A child calls its mother's sister its "little mother". In speaking of the occasional bigamy found among the **Naron** in contrast to other Bushman tribes, an old man said to me: 593 [601] [604] 595

"A man may take a second wife, if he wishes. If they agree well, they live in one hut; if not, each makes herself a hut. A man had better take his wife's younger sister as his second wife; then they do not quarrel, but live in one hut."

ǂka in **ǂkasha** "maternal aunt" may be derived from **ǂkai** "together". **Ho** used as a verb means "to marry", also "to give birth to children". **Ti kweba** and **ti kwesa** mean simply "my man", "my woman"; they are more often used than **hoba** and **hosha**. 196 601

A widow may marry her late husband's brother, but need not do so. She is quite at liberty to marry any other man. If she remarries, her husband is expected to look after her children; otherwise the duty falls upon their father's brother. The widow may stay near her husband's people, or return to her own people, as she pleases. 587 [604]

Grandparents, particularly on the mother's side, are very fond of adopting a grandchild. They will half adopt one, even during both parents' lifetime. The grandmother is generally the person who teaches a child to speak. 597 603 [868]

In concluding these notes on the tables of relationship, I should like to say that I know they are very incomplete. At the time of my stay among the **ǂkau ǂen** and **Naron** I had not realized the importance of this side of native life; nor apparently had my aunt, Dr. Lloyd, whose work I rely on for the **ǂxam** and **ǃkuŋ** tables. Still, I think sufficient has been collected to show the general trend of Bushman family ties. 114

One must always remember, that people depending on nature for their entire food supply, can only exist in very small, widely scattered groups. Families cannot be large. Drought and famine 105 161

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[821] and left them lying alone, whereupon they ascended to the sky.
[773] This story, adds Lebzelter, is not believed in at all by the people, who told it to him with great laughter.[1]

Other prayers to the New Moon are found, however, among the
[782] !O Kung in Angola. Miss Bleek describes a dance seen by her,
[535] in which the women and girls stood in a group on one side singing and clapping their hands, while the men, singing also but not clapping, were in an irregular group on the other side, wriggling their whole bodies but otherwise hardly moving. The song accompanying this dance was a repetition of the words :—

[539]

//nwa-se //kakoma //gu a i-i,	New Moon, come out, give water to us,
//nwa-se tatana //gu a i-i,	New Moon, thunder down water for us,
//nwa-se tala u //gu a i-i,	New Moon, shake down water for us.

Here also, as among the Naron and Auen, the Moon is therefore looked upon as the raingiver, and is prayed to as such—and rain, it must be remembered, makes the plants grow which feed the buck, hence it provides both vegetable and animal food. The New Moon is said to be either a child or a man, while the Full Moon is a woman. This distinction Miss Bleek interprets in the light of the difference in form presented by these two aspects of the Moon. In Naron and
[193] Nama the masculine and feminine endings are given to the same
[196] roots to denote respectively strong, tall, slender things and weak, short, round things. So here the New Moon may be called a man, because of its slenderness, the Full Moon a woman because of its round shape. The Moon is also held to be the elder sister, the sun the younger; but apparently there are no special practices or beliefs regarding the latter, although one of Miss Bleek's informants said: "We sing to the Sun and the Stars as well as the Moon." No prayers
[782] to the former are recorded, however.[2]

The only other Bushmen of whose ideas relating to the heavenly bodies we have information are the Hiechware. Dornan states that
[184] he was unable to discover among them any special ceremonies connected with the sun and the moon, but that they certainly do reverence these bodies, although seeming to dread them more than anything else. They think they must keep on good terms with the sun and the moon if they are to be successful in hunting or anything
[782] else they undertake. He could not, however, discover any prayers

[1] Religiösen Vorstellungen der *//Kun*-Buschmänner," 401; *idem*, "Bei den !Kun Buschleuten" 13.
[2] "Buschmänner von Angola," 53; *idem*, "Bushmen of Central Angola," 119–20, 122, 124.